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## *Meghan Rene, et al., v. Dr. Suellen Reed, et al.*

### Lesson 4: Oral Arguments On-Line

A lesson plan for secondary teachers on conducting mock oral arguments \*

\*The staff of the judicial branch chose this case as a useful tool to teach an interesting aspect of the law. Its selection has no bearing on how the case will ultimately be decided. Since the members of the Court did not participate in the preparation of the lesson plan; the issues raised in it will not necessarily be addressed in the oral argument.

#### **Background:**

This lesson is based on the case of *Rene v. Reed*. A case summary, the [appellant's](#) (Rene's) petition to transfer, the [appellee's](#) (Reed's) opposition to the petition to transfer, the [Court of Appeals opinion](#) and the one-hour webcast of the January 30, 2002 oral argument before the Indiana Supreme Court are all available on-line at <http://www.in.gov/judiciary/education/cotm.html>.

A separate lesson, giving an overview of the [structure of Indiana's court system](#), is also available to provide students with general information about how Indiana courts work. It can be found on the "Courts in the Classroom" homepage at <http://www.in.gov/judiciary/education/>.

A [glossary](#) of legal terms used in this and other Courts in the Classroom lesson plans is available on-line as well.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this lesson students should be able to:

1. Conduct a mock [oral argument](#) based on briefs provided and further research as assigned by the instructor;
2. Articulate and differentiate between the arguments made by opposing counsel in an oral argument; and
3. Write an opinion for the case outlining why one legal argument prevailed over the other based on their reading, research, and viewing of the oral argument.

#### **Learning Activities:**

This lesson plan was written by Elizabeth R. Osborn, Special Assistant to the Chief Justice for Court History and Public Education. If you have any questions about this lesson, or [ORAL ARGUMENTS ONLINE](#), feel free to contact her at (317) 233-8682 or [eosborn@courts.state.in.us](mailto:eosborn@courts.state.in.us).

**Note:** The order of these activities is arbitrary. A teacher might decide to have his or her class watch the oral argument first, and then conduct a mock hearing, or vice versa. In the event that you would like students to watch another oral argument to remain unbiased about this case's content, please return to the main [Courts in the Classroom](#) website to select an appropriate case.

1. Teachers should ask their students to read the case briefs and the case summary for *Rene v. Reed*. Divide the class into several groups: the appellant (Meghan Rene), the appellee (Dr. Suellen Reed, Superintendent of Public Instruction), and the court officers (a sheriff, a timer, and a panel of five justices). Each group will be assigned the task of preparing for a different part of the oral argument.
2. Students can use the information they gathered in Activity 1 in order to conduct a mock oral argument. (The information provided in the October 2001 Case of the Month: [Lesson 1](#) might be helpful for this exercise as well). Those assigned to act as judges should read the briefs and research the cases the attorneys rely on most heavily in the briefs. (Recent [Indiana court opinions](#) can be accessed online. Libraries that carry the Indiana Cases volumes will have all Indiana cases.) Student judges might also prepare questions to ask the attorneys. Those acting as attorneys (and their law clerks) should prepare an argument for the court. A judge may interrupt at any time with a question. Some judges are very active questioners, as exemplified by the panel in the *Rene* case.
3. Watch the oral argument in the case of *Rene v. Reed*. Students should take notes on the arguments made by each attorney. How well did they present the information outlined in their briefs? Have they presented any new arguments? Did the justices ask many questions? How would you characterize their questions? What issues did the justices seem particularly interested in pursuing?
4. After watching the *Rene* oral argument, and/or conducting your own mock argument, ask students to write an opinion for the case. You may ask them to write a majority opinion, a concurring opinion, or a dissent. Make sure the students address the specific legal argument under discussion. They should not give their feelings about the case. Instead, they should come to a conclusion based on the facts presented and legal precedents. Recent and current [Indiana Supreme Court and Court of Appeals opinions](#) are archived on the judiciary website if you wish to provide your students with sample opinions.
5. The Court denied Rene's [petition to transfer](#), therefore the appeal is at an end. After asking students to come up with their own opinions, ask them to read the [opinion of the Court of Appeals](#). Talk about how their opinions and the Court's differed.

### **For Further Study**

The Indiana Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and the Tax Court hear oral arguments regularly. Teachers might consider bringing a class to tour the State House and to watch an oral argument. To arrange a special tour of the courtroom or to check on upcoming oral arguments

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please contact Elizabeth Osborn at (317) 233-8682 or [eosborn@courts.state.in.us](mailto:eosborn@courts.state.in.us). [Guided tours of the State House](#) can be arranged through the tour office at (317) 233-5293 or [captours@idoa.state.in.us](mailto:captours@idoa.state.in.us).

The [legal links](#) menu on the Judicial System's homepage provides a wide variety of resources for students and teachers. From this site teachers can link to opinions handed down by Indiana and federal courts, publications and contact information for local and national bar associations, Indiana law schools, and other sites containing legal resources.

If you are interested in viewing an oral argument from another state Supreme Court consider visiting [Florida's court website](#).

### **Related Indiana Social Studies Standards**

U.S. Government.5.13: Practice civic skills and dispositions by participating in a group of activities such as simulated public hearings, mock trials, and debates.

U.S. Government.3.6: Explain the functions of the courts of law in governments of the United States and the state of Indiana with emphasis on the principles of judicial review and an independent judiciary.

U.S. Government.1.13: Examine fundamental documents in the American political tradition..., the United States Constitution,...the Indiana Constitutions of 1816 and 1851 to identify key ideas regarding the nature of limited government and the protection of individual rights.